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DEMOCRATIC RADIO ADDRESS

Johnson says: Lawmakers should choose the side of Maine's farmers, fishermen, and schools and support local food hubs

In this fast moving 21st century world, sometimes it's important to just "get back to basics." And there could be no greater truism for today's food and agriculture movement than that.

More and more, not only do we want to know what's in our food but we also want to know where our food is grown or harvested.

Good Morning. This is State Senator Chris Johnson of Somerville.

This connection to our food extends beyond what's healthy; it also grows our sense of community, and it strengthens our local economy. All you have to do is visit your local farmer's market to get a taste for what local agriculture has done for Maine.

Many aren't aware of this fact, but did you know that Maine has more working farms than any other state in New England?—and that while the rest of the nation is seeing a decline in working farms, Maine is experiencing an uptick. Successes like these need to be praised and built upon.

And that is why, this session, I sponsored a food hubs bill that makes it easier to distribute local foods from small farms to new markets. Unfortunately Governor LePage vetoed the measure, in spite of its overwhelming bipartisan support. In fact, in the Senate, it passed unanimously!

Food hubs help gather, store, distribute, promote, and sell products from small farms to new markets such as schools and grocery stores.

My foods hub bill would build upon Maine's existing competitive advantages. It uses grants for good business planning, and competitive loans to develop local food hubs; and additionally, it would provide guidance to schools that are interested in using more local food. That helps develop a larger institutional market for Maine food.

In his veto letter, Governor LePage said we need to leave that to the “natural forces” of the marketplace but I disagree. Good government is all about strengthening what works. And food hubs have a proven track record for working in other states.

In rural Mississippi, the Holmes County Food Hub works with 25 small and medium-sized farms to reach out to more than 300,000 students.

A Chicago food hub employs 45 people and has sold more than \$4.5 million in sales.

Maine’s schools are looking for guidance in putting local foods on their menus successfully. And the evidence is clear that Maine’s farmers are poised for growth not just here in Maine but also regionally.

Next Thursday, Maine lawmakers will have a decision to make. They can choose the side of Maine’s farmers, fishermen, and schools or let the governor’s politics of obstruction get in the way.

Personally, I don’t think we can ignore the success of our local farmers and fishermen. We can’t ignore the demand of Mainers for local food. And we can’t ignore the existing boost agriculture has made to local Maine economies.

Thank you for listening. This is State Senator Chris Johnson of Somerville. Have a great weekend.

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